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SUBJECT: URUGUAY: PRESIDENT VAZQUEZ NONCOMMITTAL AS
COLOMBIA'S URIBE SEEKS SUPPORT

¶1. (U) Summary. Colombian President Alvaro Uribe took his whirlwind tour of South America to Uruguay August 6, meeting with President Tabare Vazquez to solicit the Uruguayan leader's support for an agreement granting U.S. forces access to seven Colombian military bases. Vazquez expressed Uruguay's respect for Colombia's sovereignty in the matter, but also affirmed Uruguay's historical opposition to foreign intervention in Latin America. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Uribe's visit to Uruguay marked the penultimate leg of a continental tour in which Uribe lobbied regional heads of state to back the U.S./Colombia agreement prior to the August 10 meeting of the Union of South American Nations (Unasur) in Quito. (Note: Vice President Rodolfo Nin Novoa will represent Uruguay at the Unasur summit; President Vazquez will not attend.)

¶3. (U) An Uruguayan MFA press release following the visit portrayed Vazquez as neither condemning nor supporting the proposed agreement. According to the statement, during his meeting with Uribe the Uruguayan president emphasized the principle of non-intervention in internal matters of other states while also maintaining Uruguay's historical opposition to the establishment of foreign military bases in Latin America. Finally, Vazquez also urged a peaceful solution to controversies between states - an obvious reference to the diplomatic tensions between Venezuela and Colombia that have been linked to the proposed agreement.

¶4. (U) Comments from local politicians fell along similar lines as the government's statement. Despite earlier statements decrying the U.S. as a party-crasher ("convidado de piedra") in Colombia and condemning the agreement itself as a scam ("balurdo medio grueso"), Jose Mujica, presidential candidate for Vazquez's Frente Amplio (FA) coalition, toned down his rhetoric during a visit to Brasilia (septel), urging negotiation and reconciliation. Despite Mujica's equivocation, FA leadership came out more strongly against the agreement, releasing an official statement charging that the accord "not only threatens the sovereignty of the Colombian people, but also constitutes a direct threat in the region, affecting democratic stability and peaceful coexistence on the continent." While opposition National Party (PN) candidate Luis Alberto Lacalle did not comment on the Vazquez/Uribe meeting, PN senator Sergio Abreu told a local newspaper that his party respects Colombia's sovereignty in the matter, but would never permit American bases in Uruguay.

Schandlbauer